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### Long Running Nigerian Letter Scam Raking in Millions

The Montana Consumer Protection Office is again warning Montana consumers and businesses about Nigerian letters, e-mails and fax scams. For two decades, consumers across the country have fallen prey to the Nigerian Letter Scam. Despite extensive efforts by law enforcement, consumer protection advocates and even the media to warn people about it, this scam just refuses to die.

The confidence schemes appear as various proposals from "top officials" of the Nigerian government or ministries. The so-called officials are interested in importation of goods into their country with funds that are presently trapped in Nigeria. They request assistance to transfer the trapped funds into the personal or business account of an overseas partner and ask for full banking particulars to transfer the money. This scheme involves millions of dollars, and the goal of the scam is to delude victims into thinking they have been singled to participate in a very lucrative arrangement. There is always a message of strict confidence and urgency.

Once a consumer forwards money or products to Nigeria in one of these scams, it is difficult, if not impossible, to recoup losses. If the consumer participates, he/she may also be pressured or threatened to provide one or more large sums of money to save the venture.

Today, victims are handing over as much as \$100 million a year worldwide, according to one conservative government estimate. Unfortunately, few of the scammers have been caught and convicted. One problem is that many victims are too embarrassed to come forward, while others have become so caught up in the stories told by the con artists that no amount of coaxing can convince them that they have been duped.

Cort Jensen, Chief Legal Counsel for the Consumer Protection Office advises that Montana consumers should not respond to a suspicious fax, e-mail or letter and should forward such correspondence to the Consumer Protection Office, Department of Administration, P. O. Box 200151, Helena, Montana 59620.